Join in the Dance: Didacticism in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice

Lisa Morales

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses](https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8279](https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8279)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
JOIN IN THE DANCE: DIDACTICISM IN JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Humanities

in

The Interdepartmental Program in the Humanities

by

Lisa Morales
B.A., Louisiana State University, 1996
May 1998
MANUSCRIPT THESSES

Unpublished theses submitted for the Master's and Doctor's Degrees and deposited in the Louisiana State University Libraries are available for inspection. Use of any thesis is limited by the rights of the author. Bibliographical references may be noted, but passages may not be copied unless the author has given permission. Credit must be given in subsequent written or published work.

A library which borrows this thesis for use by its clientele is expected to make sure that the borrower is aware of the above restrictions.

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
I dedicate my work to my daughters: Melissa, Mandi, Jill, Jodi and granddaughter, Morgan.
Many heartfelt thanks to my major professor, Dr. Jim Borck, who, like Austen, has a special style of bringing out a method of inquiry in his students, for without his belief in my abilities this thesis would not have been possible. To Mr. David Madden and Dr. Carolyn Jones who encouraged me to write—I thank you. To the most important persons in my life, my daughters and granddaughter, who have "endured" with me during this process—I am forever grateful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................... iii

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................. v

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 1

2 AUSTEN'S IRONIC DIDACTICISM ......................................................... 7

3 JOIN IN THE DANCE: DIDACTICISM IN JANE AUSTEN'S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ......................... 12

4 DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION ................................................................. 30

5 CONCLUSION .............................................................................................. 36

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................... 38

VITA ................................................................................................................... 42
ABSTRACT

The importance of didacticism in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* may sometimes be overlooked in an effort to be entertained by the fairy-tale essence of her work. This is unfortunate since *Pride and Prejudice* offers a rich critique of eighteenth-century English society, as well as heralds the beginning of a new form of novel writing. This new form of novel writing includes a vision of an autonomous heroine who exercises freedom from patriarchal society and the “marriage market.”

Austen’s ironic didacticism in *Pride and Prejudice* highlights hypocrisy and contradiction, and in so doing, mock social expectations. It is through her ironic didacticism, play on universal belief systems, and contrasting characters that readers are provoked to inquiry about the effectiveness of rigidly held belief systems. With inquiry comes dialogue which increases knowledge and with knowledge come opportunities for learning. This is Austen’s highly didactic method.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's work hailed the beginning of a new kind of novel in the eighteenth-century; a new model for relationships "built on the revision of the old' and shows us the possibility of changing the old into the new" (Cohen 231). During the time of Austen's writing there existed a crisis of values, compounded by economic flux, which became depicted in this new sort of literature. From the pastoral scenes came the romanticized love, yet Austen takes the notion of romanticized love and brings to this notion a didactic message, quite domestic, situated within the walls of a small rural society where personal conduct can be closely scrutinized.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, there are no women who have the propensity to faint, no rapes or abductions, and no assaults on female virtue (taking into consideration that Lydia Bennet was a willing partner in running off with Wickham). These actions against women were the heritage of female protagonists of the novels of the day, prior to Austen. Austen transforms love as it was understood in the novel, from a passion antithetical to or at least unrelated to friendship, and instead "[love] becomes . . . a form of friendship. . . .

It could thus hardly be more different from the friendship idealized in the sentimental novels of Austen's day, with their conventions of
instantaneous intimacy and, upon the young heroines’ separation . . .” (Deresiewicz 519).

Critic Raymond Williams attributes this change in literature to a change in social character,

Yet the transition marked by the Civil War, the Commonwealth, the Restoration and the constitutional settlement of 1688 fundamentally altered the social character of England, and it is not surprising that in ideology, in mediation and in new creative work the literature of the country also changed (55).

An interest in human relationships to the agrarian capitalism emerged and sparked the creation of the novel. What is dramatized, under increasing pressure, in the actions of *Pride and Prejudice*, is the long process of adjusting economic advantage to other ideas of value.

Austen’s heroine, Elizabeth Bennet sees a relation between economic freedom and intelligence and wants most powerfully to be an “intelligent observer of the world.” What Austen reveals in *Pride and Prejudice* is how self-worth is shaped by learning in a strong female heroine—Elizabeth Bennet.

Austen didactic technique teaches us that language, verbal and non-verbal, can be a conduit for conflict by which ideas can grow, and through ideas come opportunities for learning. Her work becomes a shift in focus, a springboard for discussion, rather than a historic accounting. Analyzing social communication against a changing social environment stimulates inquiry—and through inquiry comes
teaching. Richard Whately defines in his essay, "Technique and Moral Effect in Jane Austen's Fiction," the teaching elements of her work,

The moral lessons . . . spring incidentally from the circumstances of the story; they are not forced upon the reader, but he is left to collect them . . . for himself; [Austen's] is that unpretending kind of instruction which is furnished by real life; and certainly no author has ever conformed more closely to real life, as well as in the incidents, as in [her] characters and descriptions (285).

Austen has confidence that her readers are as "real to life" as her characters—some will be fools, some recluses, but some will be like Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, and by our desire to be like one of these two, we are morally instructed.

Austen's moral lessons from "real life" as an authorial technique is shared by Wayne Booth, one of the pioneers of disseminating authorial devices, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*,

Even the most permanent values receive altered conventional expression from man to man, region to region, and time to time. The greatest artists do, indeed, plumb to permanent values (111).

A didactic (teaching) moment occurs when the reader observes a conflict in belief-systems, for example, charm and elegance without a moral force makes for contradiction (Lady Catherine de Bourgh) and superficial morality can lead to baseness, such as in the characters of Wickham and Lydia. Booth further explains Austen's use of a wide range of moral judgment by her use of contrasting characters,
[Jane Austen] presents a broad range of moral judgment (from the almost complete approval of Jane Fairfax in Emma to the contempt for Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*), of wisdom from Knightly to Miss Bates or Mrs. Bennet), of taste, of tact, of sensibility (158).

The contrasting choices Austen makes for the depiction of her women characters suggest a tension with social ideology, creating a new way of seeing cultural authority. Her writing may signify an anxiety that women writers were expressing exemplified by an assertion that women be defined based upon their own needs.

The romantic love story of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy dramatizes how women could respond to the demands of eighteenth-century English society. Jane Austen writes a novel in which women stay within acceptably feminine categories, and yet, make choices without disrupting their own self-worth.

The protagonists, Elizabeth and Darcy share a similar indignation against what society expects from them and they express this through rebellion against societal norms. While Austen’s instruction is poignantly conveyed through a symbolic structure of the rural English country life modified from English attitudes, it is diffused through the love story. In this way, Austen distances herself from political critique by not confronting the rapidly changing historical events of her time.

For all of their rebellion, both to each other and to society, the changes that take place in the characters of Elizabeth and Darcy
depict a desire for stability. Elizabeth and Darcy will eventually make their own choices regardless of economical consequences. Their rebellious attitudes are depicted through conversations at Netherfield which are a "complimentary interplay between the very qualities of character—Darcy’s insistence, Elizabeth’s wit—that once clashed so irremediably" unveils their common spiritedness (Deresiewicz 527). Austen’s depiction of Elizabeth’s internal conflict towards Darcy’s pride may underscore an underlying expression of anger about social expectations. Elizabeth’s prejudice towards Darcy is an Austen tool for didactic expression, for it teaches two lessons: first, how social beliefs can place people into collective categories, and second, prejudice is a basis for mis-reading individuals.

The power struggles, between class and gender, and previously depicted in eighteenth-century literature, are ameliorated by a desire for marrying for love. While there are certainly examples of domesticity in *Pride and Prejudice*, the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy serves a redemptive power in relationships and the sacrificing of self. The protagonists’ underscore the effects man-made institutions and social standards have had on personal integrity. Elizabeth ennobles her own position as a woman, for she becomes part of a much larger legacy by which female heroines assimilate with equally strong men within their societies.
Austen's choice to embody the past in a small rural community suggests a desire to critique social behavior—a crisis of values that places the female as commodity, which Austen, writing in its wake, had to come to terms. That she had to reckon with a changing environment is a crucial point that makes Elizabeth Bennet an influential study of this new way of seeing women's roles.
CHAPTER 2
AUSTEN'S IRONIC DIDACTICISM

The didactic elements of Jane Austen's writing work against readers viewing her work as fairy-tale stories. Without grasping the important critique Austen brings to social history of the English society of the late eighteenth-century, these same readers miss her teaching methodology, the "irony" she shares with a discerning reader.

In general, didactic means teaching, a rhetorical stance that is used for teaching or instruction. It seems acceptable that a didactic technique would be for the interest of others—to act with knowledge of a particular subject and to relay that information, often from an authoritative point of view, to an audience. In order to appreciate Austen's didactic technique, and ultimately learn from it, we should reveal her frequent and subtle use of irony as a method of didacticism.

Austen bases her irony on a number of variables: ideologies, feelings, social relationships, and money. Variables that had long been taken for granted come in conflict with new ways of thinking by our hero and heroine. To be knowledgeable in making a decision is a matter of making a decision with a relatively informed awareness of the facts and their causal relationships. Early on, Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam can not do this "decision making" very often. An
unintentional ignorance is why Austen’s heroine, Elizabeth Bennet in
*Pride and Prejudice* must see the entire arena of the world to learn
the true nature of base characters, such as Wickham, and be
instructed, however reluctantly, about Darcy’s pride.

To gain from knowledge is to become heroic, but, as Austen
instructs her readers, it is ironic that Elizabeth reproaches the social-
climbing attitudes of her mother and yet ends up mistress of
Pemberly, and in order to gain pride about her life station by
marrying Darcy she must become humble. We, the readers, smile as
we watch the two most “proud” characters learn of themselves and
each other in a lengthy series of apologies. This is authorial irony
indeed . . . and heavily didactic.

Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy’s sense of self are
internalized under societal instruction. Their society reinforced whom
they ought to be or ought to become. The small rural society was a
perfect setting for Austen to mock social expectations of behavior as
a reflection of a person’s character, and she does this as she critiques
the display of the social dance.

As Elizabeth and Darcy are dancing, Elizabeth makes some
slight observation on the dance. He replies, and is silent. After a
pause of some time she addresses him a second time with “It is your
turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy—I have talked about the dance,
and you ought to make some kind of remark of the size of the room,
or the number of couples (Austen 61). Elizabeth [Austen?] turns to a mocking exposure of "both the convention and purpose in order to accomplish the exact same purpose. She includes herself within the convention and then mocks it—as a play of language" (Deresiewicz 514). Elizabeth lets Darcy know she understands the convention of the dance and mocks the purpose. For Austen to critique old-fashioned, seemingly harmless practices suggest Austen sensed an ironic social landscape. The humor of Austen’s "gentle irony" takes the sting out of a strong moral sense and marks her stern didactic pronouncements.

The mating ritual of the dances held in *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates at once the healthy side of the social customs as well as a critiquing of those same customs as having an unnatural influence on the marriage game. The convention of the dance parallels courtship with its practice of exchange,

> The practice of changing partners every two dances . . . provides the woman intimate and easy—though regulated and restrained—engagement with a series of young men (Deresiewicz 535).

Hence, it is ironic that those most interested in marriage, Mr. Collins, Miss Hurst, and Miss Bingley, participate the least.

The narrator states what is to be understood as a universal truth: "To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in
love” (Austen 7). Fitzwilliam Darcy’s refusal to dance at Meryton

Ball flouts this social construct and angers his friend, Mr. Bingley,

“Come, Darcy,” says Bingley, “I must have you dance. I

hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid

manner. You had better dance.”

“I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I

am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such an

assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your sisters

are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room,

whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up

with” (8).

That Darcy refuses to partake in a socially established ritual closes

him off from anyone outside of his own self-selected social group.

His snobbishness in speaking “occasionally to one of his own group”

Austen uses to affix prejudice in Elizabeth’s mind towards Darcy,

“He was looked at with great admiration for about half

the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned

the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be

proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased

. . .” (Austen 8).

Elizabeth’s misreading of Darcy is that he is puffed up with

pride and she is prejudiced against his behavior. Their word-play

demonstrates at once their attraction to each other and desire to

understand one another. Elizabeth tells Darcy regarding his character,

“And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.” Darcy correctly

replies with a smile, “And yours is wilfully to misunderstand them”

(Austen 40). The irony is that it is Elizabeth who must learn to

become less proud and sure of her abilities to discern character. Thus,

the dance of language is not limited to speeches, conversations, and
soliloquies, but also non-verbal language: a glance, a stare. Had Darcy participated in the dance at the ball, his actions would have signified a desire for love, and in eighteenth-century English society, a desire for marriage.

Darcy's refusal to dance indicates either an ignorance of social conventions and/or an awareness of what the convention means. Austen's observance of the complexity of reading behavior is echoed in R.A. Brower's essay, "The Controlling Hand: Jane Austen and 'Pride and Prejudice,'"

Jane Austen shows an . . . awareness of the multiple ways of reading . . . behavior. She conveys her sense of the possibility of very different interpretation of the 'same' action... through dialogues that look trivial and which are extremely ambiguous (Gray 299).

Austen's ironic didacticism occurs when Elizabeth Bennet is instructed through wrong conclusions about character when she accuses Jane of this very thing, "With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others!" (Austen 11). Elizabeth eventually scolds herself for the vanity of having prided herself in her very ability of discernment (135) which is her own pride and prejudice.
CHAPTER 3

JOIN IN THE DANCE: DIDACTICISM IN JANE AUSTEN’S PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Few readers in her own time, and far fewer in our own, have ever approached [Austen’s novels] in full and detailed agreement with the author’s norms. But they were led to join her as they read, and so are we. Wayne Booth

Wayne Booth took note of the fact that very few modern readers share the conventional beliefs of English eighteenth-century society. While written in a conservative tone, Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, preaches to us about human relationships, and yet, underneath Austen’s rhetoric lies a critique of rigid human ideologies. The thrust of Austen’s work, based on the tightly held power of social conditioning and inflexible ideologies, allows her to turn social expectations and deeply held ideologies upon themselves. This is her didacticism, and the manner in which she “turns” the unquestioned generates wonderfully ironic moments. Austen teaches that human ideology changes and self-worth is derived from making moral choices through intelligence, tempered with common sense.

The complicated conservative thrust behind Pride and Prejudice evolves through tension between social class and gender. The use of contrasting characters inform her audience by way of romantic conflicts. The conflicts prove quite important for the
readers' perception of the novel, and many readers overlook the importance. Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*, finds Austen's authorial technique a description of social expectations in order to examine personal conduct; thereby she "tests" in order to discover, "the standards which govern human behavior in certain real situations" (113). Austen's didactic "testing" invites the reader to inquire about the nature of socially held beliefs.

It is under the umbrella of discourse that sometimes Austen's heroines teach and other times they are instructed. Austen invites us to join her in the dance, or *interaction*, of personal conduct to examine social behavior. Jacques Derrida in *Acts of Literature*, discusses the way in which language questions ideologies in a sharper way via the technique,

The experience, the passion of language and writing . . . can cut across discourses which are thematically "reactionary" or "conservative" and confer upon them a power of provocation, transgression or destabilization greater than that of so-called "revolutionary" texts . . . (50).

This "passion of language" is illustrated in the back and forth motion of word-play between Mr. And Mrs. Bennet, regarding Charles Bingley, and serves to illustrate the *dance of language* between these two characters—the underlying didactic message is a social critique about a greedy and calculating society obsessed with acquisition,

"Why, my dear, you must know . . . Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of
England; he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of the week."

“What is his name?” asks Mr. Bennet.

“Bingley.”

“Is he married or single?”

“Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!” (Austen 3).

The thought of Mr. Bingley having leased a nearby estate is inducement enough for her to plan a match for him with one of her daughters. Unfortunately for the Bennet girls, their mother is presumptuous and indelicate, and eager to broadcast the news of an impending engagement between Jane and Mr. Bingley at the earliest opportunity and yet, ironically, it is fortunate for them that her brash attitudes are also fortune for them. Mrs. Bennet’s emphasis on the fortune of Mr. Bingley, as evidenced by his chaise and four, illustrates her desire for the improvement of the estate of her daughters, a very appropriate concern in a rapidly changing capitalist society.

This word play between the Bennets and a proposed meeting ironically foreshadows Elizabeth and Darcy’s non-meeting at Netherfield Ball. Here at the ball, they do not dance and they do not talk (the social purpose of the dance), but gaze and talk about the other. Darcy comments to Bingley: “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me. . . .” Elizabeth, who overhears this
conversation, tells the story with "great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous" (Austen 9).

Austen's unique style is that of a soft feminine cynicism. Margaret Oliphant's essay "Miss Austen and Miss Milford" expresses Austen's contrast of belief systems with the absurd,

It is the soft and silent disbelief of a spectator who has to look at a great many things without showing any outward discomposure, and who has learned to give up any moral classification of social sins, and to place them instead on the level of absurdities... [Austen] stands by and looks on, and gives a soft half-smile, and tells the story with an exquisite sense of its ridiculous side, and fine stinging yet soft-voiced contempt for the actors in it (286).

Austen teaches that conflicts arise when ideology comes in conflict with reality, for example, Elizabeth and Darcy first believe they could never be attracted to each other, but they are. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth, who possesses "more quickness of observation" than all of her sisters and "less pliancy of temper" than Jane, has to learn to temper her hastiness in forming judgment. Her tolerance of the ridiculous (actually modeled after her father who undoubtedly needed this skill to live with Mrs. Bennet) is a trait she needs to accept Darcy's own "ridiculous" temperament.

Austen uses strong contrast between human relationships so we can interpret and appreciate the irony of those relationships. For example, Austen sets up a contrast between the heroine's caregivers
on two levels, first, by the manner of conversation between Mr. And Mrs. Bennet’s humorous word-play. Elizabeth’s parents are opposites, both in personality and wit: Mrs. Bennet is pretentious and calculating, and as Austen tells her reader, “A woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.” Mr. Bennet, in more ways is most like our heroine later in the novel, is an odd “mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice” (Austen 5).

Secondly, Austen in the opening pages immediately sets the appeal of marriage in contrast. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are the model from which Elizabeth constructs her ideal of marriage. The Bennet’s marriage as model can be viewed as having (only) performed an action in the J.L. Austen sense of a performative action: they have conformed to an accepted conventional practice of marriage which has produced a conventional effect, which includes the uttering of certain words appropriately, correctly, and completely (Davis and Schleifer 311). Elizabeth (and the reader) are left to interpret whether this marriage is something to aspire, “for if marriage may result in the wedding of two such disparate spirits as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet then to follow the maxim may be to embrace a veritable kiss of death” (Lacour 611).

Why then do readers so easily disdain Mrs. Bennet who makes it quite well known her intentions are for the improvement of her
daughters’ fortune and consequent security for herself? Austen’s ironic didacticism contrasts truth, which is normally associated with beauty and goodness, in the unpleasant character of Mrs. Bennet.

Mrs. Bennet has an immediate reason to see her daughters married well, Longbourn was a hereditary estate that entailed to the succession of a male heir. Because the Bennets have five daughters and no sons, they will have no claim to the estate after Mr. Bennet dies. Because Longbourn will fall to their distant cousin, Mr. Collins, the female survivors will be evicted by the new owner. Raymond Williams further explains just how uncertain the future of the Bennet family is,

For these were [families] caught . . . in successive but temporary settlements: achieving a place in the altering social structure of the land but continually threatened with losing it: with being pushed down, as eventually many were, into the exposed anonymity of the landless poor (43).

For this reason, one might view Mr. Collins as a concerned relative by his marriage proposal to Elizabeth Bennet, for their matrimony would secure the Bennets’ habitat. Elizabeth finds Mr. Collins boring, silly, pretentious, and perhaps even vicious, and turns down the prospect of being well settled. She does not have such a desperate need for the favor of the wealthy because she is ignorant of the consequence of becoming one of the “landless poor.” Charlotte Lucas will set her straight in a very didactic lecture on the reality of
becoming landless. Elizabeth’s unintentional ignorance causes her to do something that most young women in her place would not dare—reject a comfortable marriage proposal.

Such misfortune as the Bennet’s losing Longbourn would be looked upon with disgrace by the middle class. Such prejudice towards those of a lesser influential class is exampled by Miss Bingley’s and Mrs. Hurst’s cruel estimation of Jane’s relations, whom they proclaim to be most insufferable and ill bred, “But with such a father and mother, and such low connections, I am afraid there is no chance of it [Jane being settled]” (Austen 25). That the Bennets have an attorney and a merchant as distant cousins are sneered at by the Bingley sisters, for this community was part of “an acquisitive, high bourgeois society at the point of its most evident interlocking with an agrarian capitalism that is itself mediated by inherited titles and by the making of family names” (Williams 115). The complicated shifts in land ownership and changes in inheritance laws prompted a necessary marriage market (what was later called ‘the season’) for the relatively scattered country landowners. A season which “reduces its players to a mutuality of objects” (51). Elizabeth’s ignorance of becoming landless makes her less enthusiastic to participate in the marriage market. It is through the Collins’ proposal, Austen contrasts the possibility of being landed versus land-less.
Between the protagonists dance of intimacy and the emphasis on improvement, there is a necessity to bridge the two by an understanding that the thrust of the economy was based on “production, money, land, houses, estates; the reduction of self worth to a crude moneyed order” (Williams 35).

What Raymond Williams calls an “idealizing abstraction” is a common observation about Austen’s work: Jane Austen incorporates her didactic message of social critique through a small localized rural community and suppresses a face-to-face confrontation of the changing economic crisis that existed during the time of her writing. This distancing from national economic flux allows Austen to focus on personal relationships—*seemingly* stable social relationships as they are negotiated in an increasing mercantile world that the misses Bingley and Hurst so despise. Austen settles the rural effect and heavily emphasizes the crisis of the day: preoccupation with estates, money, and social position:

To the social conditions already implicit in the examination of conduct, with its strong sense and exploration of the adequacy of social norms, we must add, from the evidence of the novels, a direct preoccupation with estates, incomes and social position, which are seen as indispensable elements of all the relationships that are projected and formed. . . . Much of the interest . . . lie in the changes of fortune—the facts of general change and of a certain mobility—which were affecting the landed families at this time (Williams 113).
Austen gives us a heroine, who in contrast, emphasizes freedom from prescribed social expectation and turns an economy of consumption into a moral economy with the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy.

As stated above, the social crisis of the landed families was an integral part of Austen’s novels. The irony is that it is in the socially accepted characters such as Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins (who desire wealth) and Lady Catherine de Bourgh (who displays her wealth) that standards for social conduct are set. It is through Elizabeth and Darcy, who are socially unacceptable and have money, that Austen critiques social philosophy. The result is an unraveling of rigidly held ideologies to expose belief systems that no longer work. Austen places the protagonists within their social construct, and at the same time separate, seeming to insist that social change has to come from “the interaction of cultural discipline and individual commitment . . . conversely, however individual energy must be generated within social contexts, for, lacking social direction and control, it turns too easily to withdrawal from society, or to irresponsibility and anarchy” (Duckworth 132). Austen employs a “cool hand” at exploiting materialism while maintaining her heroine’s integrity,

[Austen] guides her heroines, steadily, into the right marriages. She makes settlements, alone, against all odds, like some supernatural lawyer, in terms of that exact proportion to moral worth which could assure the continuity of the general formula (Duckworth 116).
This moral calculating of Austen equates to huge sums of money and a large estate equal to the self-worth of Elizabeth Bennet. Austen proportions her characters' due to the exactness of their moral worth. The other relationship models in the novel come up shortchanged in one way or another: Mr. and Mrs. Collins have economic security but no passion or mutual respect; Mr. And Mrs. Bennet have no money, no mutual respect, nor affection; and Wickham and Lydia have no money and no mutual respect. Fictional justice is served in face of the reality of the times. The only relationship that comes close to Elizabeth and Darcy's is sister Jane and Charles Bingley, to whom Austen appropriates a comfortable security.

According to Williams, an idealization of moral order is imposed by this society in an effort to find stability,

A moral order is abstracted from the feudal inheritance and break-up, and seeks to impose itself ideally on conditions which are inherently unstable. . . . An idealization, based on . . . a deep desire for stability, served to cover and to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time (45).

While assessing moral calculations, Austen incorporates political and ceremonial props, that is, the dance, social class, wealth and beauty, and accomplishments (the most important) to reinforce the believability of these characters. Accomplishment and charm for young ladies were important commodities. That the Bingley sisters talk so often and so openly of the superior accomplishments of their
acquaintances leaves Elizabeth Bennet out in the cold: she admits she doesn’t take the time to practice the piano enough to become “accomplished”; she does not play cards, nor is she interested in needlework. Elizabeth has confidence in herself not to try to become an “accomplishment” in order to increase her market value. Elizabeth says,

“My fingers . . . do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do . . . But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I would not take the trouble of practicing” (Austen 115).

Austen uses the piano as metaphor to demonstrate that “social discourse—that presumably female talent—is not inherited but learned” (Cohen 228).

Piano playing, drawing, and painting were utilitarian functions, in an age before radio and television, these abilities played an important social value. Yet, Darcy holds an even higher standard for his women, for besides accomplishments, a woman “must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading” (Austen 27). Consequently, Austen makes our heroine an avid reader. Elizabeth’s refusal to become accomplished and Darcy’s requiring intellect in his women reveals a pair of young people who refuse to conform to socially prescribed gender expectations—a bold move for Austen to appropriate.
After apparently unpretentious Elizabeth Bennet has been slighted by Darcy at the initial assembly, she is further prejudiced against him by Wickham’s accusations. It is ironic that Austen pairs Elizabeth, and Darcy’s sister, as the two women Darcy loves, and thereby most susceptible to social damage by Wickham. Wickham lies and tells Elizabeth that Darcy has deprived him of a living which was granted by his godfather, Darcy’s father,

“Mr. Darcy chooses to doubt it—or to treat it as merely conditional recommendation, and to assert that I had forfeited all claim to it by extravagance, imprudence, in short any thing or nothing. Certain it is, that the living became vacant two years ago, exactly as I was an age to hold it, and that it was given to another man; and no less certain it is, that I cannot accuse myself of having really done anything to deserve to lose it. I have a warm, unguarded temper, and I may perhaps have sometimes spoken my opinion of him, and to him, too freely. I can recall nothing worse” (Austen 54).

Wickham is a spendthrift who very nearly ruins the reputation of the Bennet family when he elopes with Elizabeth’s sister just as he very nearly ruins the reputation of Darcy’s family by running off with his sister. Only Darcy’s intervention saves this potentially unhappy occurrence by purchasing the “necessary” marriage. Without external intervention he may have been successful at capturing Elizabeth since she based her feelings for him on his outward appearance of morality. Austen emphasizes that moral character may not always be what it seems. Austen is concerned with “exposing the weakness of
[Elizabeth’s] sensibility, and the folly and danger of trusting completely to it” (Brissenden 275).

The friction between Elizabeth and Darcy throughout the novel provides the reader an opportunity to examine the hypocrisy of societal expectations. Society would have compelled Elizabeth to be immediately grateful and submissive to the opportunities Darcy could provide,

What was happening in fiction to some extent reflected what was happening—or what many people felt ought to be happening—in life. The status of women was changing . . . and there was a general tendency for bourgeois respectability to replace aristocratic freedom as the most admired norm, both in life and literature (Brissenden 88).

Elizabeth must carefully discard the internalized system of beliefs of that she was born: economic necessity predicates social conduct. She must learn to make her value judgments based on her own understanding while assimilating with society.

Austen’s back and forth motion of language, between the perceived and the real, performs then, a dance of language that reveals just how unstable society and language have become at the end of the eighteenth-century. Brissenden explains in *Virtue in Distress*, that Austen was an anti-sentimentalist, and the constant ironic juxtaposition she makes in character pairing satirizes sentimentalism (294). This satirical exposure of sentimental and
romantic absurdities develops in to a didactic message of moral
worth.

The unfavorable picture Austen initially paints of Darcy, that
of a proud man, gradually changes as Austen’s characters reveal more
facts about him. Late in the novel, his romantic letter to Elizabeth
clears up the misrepresentations Wickham had made against his
character. We readers (both Elizabeth and the novel’s reader) come to
find that some of Darcy’s restraint and aloofness is due to shyness,
not his disdain for those he considers inferior.

Instructed by Darcy’s letter of his true character, Elizabeth too
begins to know herself, and to change her behavior and reshape her
attitudes. By Darcy’s frank disclosures, some of them his opinions
about the characteristics of her family, of which Elizabeth agrees,
Austen proposes a new marriage state against the other couples in the
novel. In his letter, we learn that “men and women exert positive
influences on one another within marriage-directed and domestic
relationships . . .” (Shaffer 65). As Austen draws the novel to a close
and resolves most of the romantic conflicts (not all of Elizabeth’s
sisters are married), Elizabeth’s initial disdain for the snobbery of the
upper class, places her firmly within their ranks. Behind the velvet
curtain of Pemberly we can hope that a new generation of social
expectations will be forthcoming.
So it is ironic that the Netherfield non-dance, in an arena with a lot of social “necessary” freight, the business of getting married evokes Austen to create a picture of social expectations and manners in eighteenth-century England, which for young ladies, as Mrs. Bennet bluntly states, the utmost importance was to buy their security through marriage. This dilemma is expressed most clearly by Charlotte Lucas’ rational views of her chances of marrying at all, which are slim.

Marriage has become Charlotte’s primary goal, for she is twenty-seven years old, not especially beautiful, and without an inheritance. When Mr. Collins proposes to her, she immediately decides to marry him. When Elizabeth hears Charlotte’s pragmatic view of marriage, she is horrified (perhaps here is a bit of genuine contest jealousy), to which Charlotte resolutely replies:

“I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collin’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (Austen 84).

Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas’ opposing positions on marriage are most apparent in the different way each perceives the marriage state and relative happiness. After Charlotte’s treaty on marriage, Elizabeth is left to reflect about a part of her best friend she did not know: “She had always felt that Charlotte’s opinion of
matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage” (84). Miss Lucas understands the economic exchange of domesticity and compliance in exchange for security.

Elizabeth Bennet does not need a relationship to identify her. Her independence from the marriage plot is most evidenced by the contrast between the immediacy from which Elizabeth and Charlotte choose marriage,

Charlotte’s acceptance [of Collins’ proposal] shows us what even a highly sensible, perceptive, and intelligent woman would do when facing the prospect of spinsterhood in this provincial society. . . . Elizabeth’s stand for independence becomes not just a natural choice for any woman but a choice for a certain kind of woman (Phelan 294).

It is not to say that Elizabeth did not have hopes to marry, but she will marry for the right reason, which alone is not security. Her independent spirit is dramatized by a continual deviation from expected feminine roles; for when hearing her sister Jane is ill at the home of Bingley, she risks running into Darcy after she had walked through rain and mud to get to Jane,

“Her eagerness to visit her sick sister has made her unconscious of her appearance, and such refusal to care what others think becomes an additional reinforcement to her initial attitude of opposition” (Cohen 227).
This example demonstrates Austen’s ability to reconstruct idealizations of femaleness.

By underscoring Charlotte and Elizabeth’s relationship, Jane Austen dramatizes their dialogue as instructive, didactic, and ironic. When Elizabeth realizes that Charlotte is firm with her decision to marry Mr. Collins, Elizabeth never brings up the obvious absurdity again, respecting Charlotte’s decision. This friendship has rewards for Elizabeth, for she is able to see her friend make a lifelong commitment and learn from Charlotte’s pragmatism. What is clear is that even though Charlotte does not harbor dreams of marital relationships in the same way Elizabeth does, Charlotte’s decision is vital to her own sense of self-worth. Living a life of spinsterhood is a real dilemma Charlotte could face.

Austen is explicit about the life-sustaining role involved in Charlotte’s decision to marry Collins. Shortly after Charlotte and Collins are married, Elizabeth arrives for a visit where she notices Charlotte’s blush or overt ignorance of Collins buffoonery. Charlotte has genuinely accepted her lot and turns her head when her husband is repulsive.

In this contrasting relationship between Charlotte and Elizabeth, Austen positions the reality of the times against the possibilities for women. Marriage to Mr. Collins for Charlotte gives her a way to interact, to connect, and to feel herself valued by
society, even though she is married to an impossibly silly man. By portraying marriage choice (or non-choice) as a social act that serves important social and economic functions for both the men and the women, Jane Austen provides an interpretation of the necessity of the marriage market. This “old” way of seeing is in contrast to a new ideology embodied in Elizabeth Bennet’s independence towards the “marriage market.”
CHAPTER 4
DIDACTIC COMMUNICATION

Readers accepting traditional belief systems as believable, results from the persuasiveness of Austen’s art. Thus Austen reveals in language a traditional belief system that the reader can accept and assimilate with their own understanding. A reading of Austen’s use of language as didactic must account not only for the way the author displays language and the reader decodes meaning, but also what language the author decides to display and what the reader decides to accept and be persuaded by. Austen, by way of ironic didacticism cautions the reader to be skeptical of any belief that language is a reliable means by which humans interact. Jane Austen’s ironic didacticism provides evidence that when considered within the parameter of this technique, language, verbal and non-verbal, performs important cultural examinations for its audiences. The ironic didacticism Austen employs to connect author and reader is an interaction with the reader and provides the best connection, much like the unity of Elizabeth and Darcy.

Jane Austen constructs a heroine in *Pride and Prejudice* that is not the prettiest or the most accomplished, for the lesson is that women should be valued for internal values and a respect for themselves and others. By combining the concerns of economic and
social status of women with a romantic ethos, Jane Austen compels a reexamination of the dance, gender expectations, and land exchange by her method of bringing the function of personal conduct into full view. Lessons can be learned only if the reader is in tune to Austen's language of didactic irony.

While Elizabeth Bennet brings a new way of seeing to the novel, a self-awareness that transforms attitudes and feelings of the prevailing social order, in order for her to view, observe and critique her environment, she has to be a part of that social class. Williams reminds us of this maxim, "To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable" (166).

Didactic success must exceed simply communicating traditional belief systems, it must enable the author to control the response of the reader until the author is ready to reveal a revelation, as in Darcy's letter to Elizabeth. Darcy's humility makes us aware that his willingness to marry "beneath his class" is a willingness to tolerate an almost complete obnoxious family. His tolerance of others is the result of being instructed by Elizabeth of his own shortcomings.

Austen employs universal belief systems throughout the novel in order to critique social agreements. That there are only a few given truths about human relationships that can be treated as universally acknowledged, is a premise that brings the reader along in the plot.
Austen plays with this notion of a universal belief system to set up the underlying belief system of the novel: men want to marry women, even if that desire creates marriages like that of Mr. And Mrs. Bennet, Charlotte and Mr. Collins, and Lydia and Wickham,

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters (Austen 3).

This, perhaps the most famous paragraph in literature, opening statement of the novel is immediately reinforced by the outspoken, Mrs. Bennet with her money and marriage equation of fixing Mr. Bennet to call on the new neighbor who has a chaise and four. Therefore if you agree with Austen, you find yourself agreeing with Mrs. Bennet. We are horrified at the pretentious Mrs. Bennet, however ironic it is that she speaks the truth. Without Austen’s didacticism, which allows for “fresh observation and reconsideration, conjecture crowns itself as certainty, and beliefs once accepted harden into ‘universal truths’” (Deresiewicz 505).

The novel does lead to marriages like that of Jane and Charles, and Elizabeth and Darcy, but whether we believe in the sense of the opening paragraph is unimportant, for the point is we generally agree that “it may be operatively true when people act as if it’s true” and move along in the text. It is Austen’s discourse of generalized
language and tradition that evokes the desired response from the reader and emphasizes “the power of discourse to determine action” (Brownstein 64). Austen breaks down “universal knowledge” in the space of a sentence to “a kind of mock or ironic maxim” (Lacour 608). This opening declaration appeals to the emotions of the audience and references the characters of the novel, yet, Austen’s always ever-present irony questions the premise.

Richard Simpson suggests Austen’s use of generalized societal notions of happiness can come in no other means than by marriage,

> Miss Austen believed in the ultimate possible happiness of every marriage. . . . That predestination of love, that preordained fitness, which decreed that one and only one should be the compliment and fulfillment of another’s being—that except in union with each other each must live miserable, and that no other solace could be found for either than the other’s society . . . [Austen] founded her novels on the assumption of it as a hypothesis (288).

This assumption contradicts Austen’s own personal choice to live unmarried. So a skeptical reader will instead see this authorial maneuver as a technique that the author has used to generalize a universal notion and evoke a response that she can predict and use. Austen’s generalized universal assumption that men want to marry, and women must marry underlies, her novel,

> The desperation of the hunt is the desperation of economic survival: girls in the family like that of the Bennets must succeed in running down solvent men in order to survive (Gray 305).
Elizabeth is no exception, though she stands her ground when responding to Charlotte’s plan that a young woman should secure a man first then worry about love. Elizabeth says: “Your plan is a good one . . . where nothing is in question but the desire to be well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it” (Austen 15). Elizabeth being who she is, she would.

Joining together is not just a mode of classification, but a way of seeing, a way of physical interaction seen in the symbols and rituals of harmony: music, dancing, and letter writing. The emotional reaction to the characters and assimilation with a belief system inherent in the text further solidify the underlying premise—man should marry and women must marry. Elizabeth and Darcy play two distinct roles as authorial devices. First, they epitomize the generalization that men should marry, and even more, they appeal to a romantic tradition by being strong-willed, handsome, and worthy of being loved. And the reader of Austen must want to believe in true love, even if that love involves sacrifices—the “romantic” definition of love. Foreshadowed by Elizabeth’s parents quarreling over the rich new male presence in the neighborhood, these two characters, by their misreading of one another, are authorial devices that display conflict between the way people should behave versus actual behavior.
It is necessary that Elizabeth instruct Darcy of his seemingly pompous ways, for Darcy comes to check himself against previously held notions when he admits to her that he expected immediate gratification upon his proposal,

"You taught me a lesson. . . . By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (Austen 237).

Elizabeth transcends the prescribed societal behavior for unmarried women: that economic necessity shall predicate social behavior. Her wit and good sense achieve the appropriate norms for happily married woman and perhaps this is the more important lesson.

Second, Elizabeth and Darcy’s teaching roles assimilate the new ways of thinking they learn. Viewing Elizabeth and Darcy, directs our attention to the new increasingly middle-class ideals that raise certain questions about the passing of the out-dated agrarian society of the early and middle eighteenth-century. Once we see Elizabeth and Darcy as tools for change, we can appreciate the didactic element Austen uses.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Bennet reminds us that because a woman may reshape a social tradition, that new vision for life does not have to be without money, land, and/or male companionship. Images of life pervade the romantic relationships around her: Jane Bennet is so fragile she is unable to weather a ride in the rain without falling ill; Lydia and Kitty are compelled to throw themselves in the company of men; and her dearest friend Charlotte has settled. By contrasting the female relationships that surround Elizabeth, Austen is able to elevate Elizabeth’s strong characteristics, for by them Austen can portray moral choice and the struggle to maintain a sense of self despite a changing society.

As Elizabeth is confronted with moral impoverishment and sees the self destruction this path takes (Lydia and Wickham) she learns a moral lesson. Austen focuses on Elizabeth’s development of the self, and depicts the changing ideologies that undergird each generation’s vision.

_Pride and Prejudice_ reveals Elizabeth’s transformation from the ill informed, impulsive young lady, whose wit and good sense can turn from lighthearted to cutting, to a vibrant individual in charge of her own life. Dramatizing Elizabeth’s fight for individualism may have been Austen’s way of paying tribute to a female legacy that had
become more and more devalued as the needs of society changed. Her ironic didacticism does more than portray the battles in the marriage market and highlight contradictions, it demonstrates the hypocrisy of a rigid social ideology in a changing society.

Social airs and the manipulative attempts to move people into the right economic places are the object of Austen’s humor. Austen uses language to display her sharpest judgments, and in so doing, we, the readers, also judge the multi-faceted characters to access moral worth. The irony is that we must, in turn, use the same yardstick to measure our own.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Lisa Morales received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in English from Louisiana State University in May 1996. She is a native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana and currently works in Academic Affairs for the Baton Rouge Community College. She is the proud parent of four daughters: Melissa, age 23 and is a senior at Louisiana State University; Mandi, age 21 and is a junior at Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah Georgia; Jodi, age 20 and is a sophomore at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana; and Jill, age 18 who will be a freshman at Louisiana State University in August 1998. She is also the proud grandmother of Morgan Paige Alonzo, who is 3 years old.

Lisa plans to begin teaching English in the fall of 1998 at the Baton Rouge Community College. She plans to pursue a doctorate degree in the fall of 1999.
Candidate: Lisa Morales

Major Field: Humanities

Title of Thesis: Join in the Dance: Didacticism in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice.

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]
Mr. David Madden

[Signature]
Carolyn M. Jones

Date of Examination:

2/18/92